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## Dry winter could hurt Great Lakes shipping

*Last Updated Fri Jan 4 19:22:27 2002*

MONTREAL - An unusually mild start to winter in some areas around the Great Lakes is raising concern among some shipping companies.

- INDEPTH: Weather Gone Wild

For several years water levels in the Great Lakes have been below average. Last summer they hit a 35-year record low.

That meant ships had to lighten their loads and it cost the shipping industry tens of millions of dollars.



Now shipping companies are hoping for snow and cold weather to stop the same thing from happening again this year.

Water levels in the Great Lakes have been creeping up thanks to a wet autumn. But so far winter has been unseasonably mild, and now the lakes are unusually warm. That's prevented a layer of ice from forming on their surfaces.

David Fay of Environment Canada's Great lakes-St. Lawrence regulation office in Cornwall, Ont. says that could be a problem. "Without an ice cover and with warmer than normal temperatures, there will be more evaporation from the lake surfaces than normal."

Fay points out the lakes have been ice-free at this time of year before and it's too early to worry about it.

But Rejean Lanteigne, vice-president of the Canadian Ship Owners' Association, says winter snows provide crucial meltwater for the lakes.

"It doesn't look good for skiers, it doesn't look good for water levels either. But we'll see what the rest of the winter's going to bring," he said.

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Climatologists and the shipping industry agree that lake levels are cyclical. They were even lower than they are now in the 1970s.

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Environment Canada predicts next summer's water levels will remain below average, but they could increase slightly over last year.

Lanteigne is hoping they're right, because it could save the Canadian shipping industry from another difficult year.

Written by CBC News Online staff

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